10: d'Orleans--300-301 T-3 (1891-92) 1894-
116, 436, 455, 525, 651, 177.52
636.52

Laos
Siam

"In addition to the forced labour, there is, the capitation tax, the opium tax, and the monopoly of the tchoum-tchoum, but the monopoly of gaming, which is the source of large revenue in Siam itself, has been suppressed here by the Siamese as being immoral. It is the same with the speculation upon the money exchange, which is not yet resorted to in Luang Prabang. In the valley of Ménam, more especially, the money in use is composed of earthenware counters, the circulation of which is suspended or the value altered by a Government decree, large profits being thus secured in very arbitrary fashion. Another source of profit [301] for the treasury of Luang Prabang is the produce of the customs, there being a tax of three per cent. upon the merchandise and of a basket of salt upon each canoe, which comes up from the south with a load of it."

10: d'Orleans--329-330 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 173, 436

[LSS: in Luang Prabang] "The money in circulation is the English rupee, the Siamese tical, the piastre, native coins in copper and silver, shaped like canoes, and cowries strung together like chaplets, these latter coming by way of Burmah [330] or Siam from the Gulf of Bengal. I am told a curious story about one piece of money formerly coined in the Principality of Nan; the legend is that a queen who formerly ruled over the country, was so ugly that she could not find any one to fall in love with her, and that, in order to show that, however beautiful their features may be, all women are alike, she had a certain part of her body represented on this coin."

149: Reinach--247 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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352

"What makes everything easy and is used for everything is this hollow wood, at once so solid and so light, the incomparable bamboo. In France we see it only in the form of pleasant but useless little articles of furniture. Here bamboo is sufficient to every task. It provides the whole house, frame as well as walls. The inner walls and floors are made of matted bamboo lathwork. Yet such a house, with its furniture, bed, tables, various accessories and its luxury objects, if you are a person of refinement, can be improvised for you in a space of two hours wherever you want.

"Has a bridge been washed out? In two hours, thanks to this wood which is easy to manage and to work, men will have made a new bridge. One is especially struck, at the beginning of this life which is so free and, more than any other, independent of men and things, by the great simplicity and ingenuity of all the procedures. Objects are rudimentary but practical, easy to make, soon ready and simple to repair. Everyone knows how to build ordinary furnishings, and no interruptions are caused here as they are when even the slightest damage occurs to one of our highly developed utensils, which only a specialist knows how to repair.

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436

"A bamboo tube is a safe place for your maps and papers. It is a drinking glass, and it is also a pipe for smokers. On a larger scale, it is a bucket for carrying water, and the receptacle for all liquid and solid provisions. When provided with a handle it serves as a pot for the Laotians to cook their rice in, or to prepare syrup from the sugar palm. When torn into thongs it is used as rope and string. Ligatures of sapeks are threaded on kelates, or bamboo filaments, and this is what makes our new Indo-Chinese sou, with its round hole in the middle, so impractical. Those who preside over the striking of our coins are unaware that the kelate is square, a fact which the first comer from the interior could have told them. Baskets of all kinds are made with these same kelates for holding and transporting material. Hats are also made of them to provide shelter from the sun and rain. At night, when the stage of your journey is too long and you have to continue after nightfall even at the risk of meeting a tiger, setting fire to a bamboo branch is enough to frighten any off and to light your way. And not only is bamboo used to make torches, hats, string, dishes, furniture, houses and bridges, but it also serves as animal fodder and even as food for the natives, who eat the tenderest shoots as we would eat asparagus.

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[372]
[262]
[231]

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[262]

Tamlung-Si-Bate	1/1000 picul or	0.061924	kilogram
Khanane-Lao (daily ration)	1/100 picul or	0.61924	"
Khanane-Khao	1/10 picul or	6.19245	kilograms
Boung-Koite (or Mune)	2/10 picul or	12.3849	"
Bok-Noi	3/10 picul or	18.5873	"
Bok-Niai (one man's load)	4/10 picul or	24.7698	"

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Coins and measurements of weight for silver

1. Sub-multiples of the Bak (or Salung) 1 Fuang=0.001876 kilogram
2. Multiples of the Bak (or Salung)

1 Bak or 2 Fuangs	=0.003753	"
Tep (Rupee) or 3 Baks	=0.011259	"
Bate (Tical) or 4 Baks	=0.015012	"
Piaster (Mane or Kib) or 7 Baks	=0.026271	"
Tael (Bia) or 10 Baks	=0.03753	"
Barre (Hang or Khane) or 10 Bias or 100 Baks	=0.3753	"
Sang or Cattie (silver pound) or 33 Bias or 330 Baks	=1.23849	kilograms

805 [412] Measures of length for cloth, wood, etc.

		meters
1 Niou (finger breadth)	or 1/96 Fathom	=0.01895
1 Kam (closed fist) or 6 Nious	or 1/16 Fathom	=0.11375
1 Kheup (span) or 12 Nious	or 1/8 Fathom	=0.2275
1 Sok (cubit) or 2 Kheups	or 1/4 Fathom	=0.4550
1 Wa or 4 Soks or 8 Kheups	or 1 Fathom	=1.82

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1 Sok Luong (royal cubit)	or 1/4 Royal Fathom	=0.5
1 La Luong (1 Yard and a few centimeters)	or about 1/2 Royal Fathom	=1
1 Wa Luong	or 1 Royal Fathom	=2

436 Coins. The old Laotian silver and copper coins in the shape of a pirogue which used to be used in the principalities of Vien-Tiane and Luang-Prabang can no longer be found today and have become curiosities. As a result of the Siamese incursions, the coins of Siam and India (Tical and Rupee) replaced the native coins. Finally, since Laos has become a French possession, the only officially recognized coinage is the French piaster of commerce (1) and its subdivisions.

(1) As well as the Mexican piasters of Hong-Kong and Singapore and the Japanese yen.

However, the Siamese and Hindu coins continue to circulate alongside this official coinage, and are in fact indispensable for transactions by reason of their weight, which bears a direct relation to the system in force in the land (2).

(2) The scale of equivalence between weights and coins is based on the standard of the "Salung" or tenth part of the Hong-Kong "Tael," which weighs 37.53 grams. This Tael is recognized as official for weighing opium. One might nevertheless just as well take as a basis the tenth part of the Shanghai Tael, which weighs 38.88 grams. This would give the picul a theoretical weight of 62.222 kilograms instead of 61.924 kilograms.

Silver in Laos, whether in the form of coins, bars, ingots, pieces of jewelry, etc., is regarded as merchandise and is bought and sold by weight without taking into account the agio which causes fluctuations in the market price. This is due to the fact that the Laotians, since they do not yet have direct trade and banking relations with neighboring countries, have no remittances to make in the trade centers where the agio [415][Illustration][416][Blank page][417] is felt and are ignorant of its effects on the conventional value of specie.

438 439 But in the last few years the middlemen of Laotian trade circles--the Chinese and Burmese--who are in direct relation with the centers where the agio prevails have been feeling its effects, and the latter have had repercussions on the great mass of Laotian producers through progressive increases in the price of imported merchandise.

In certain regions the absence of small coins obliges people to cut up pieces of silver, jewelry, bracelets and necklaces, or else to melt down the silver from fragments and jewelry and cast them in the

436 form of hemispherical masses, adding a proportion of copper which, as a consequence of successive remeltings, may become as high as fifty percent of the total weight.

The silver fragments and pieces of jewelry are cut up in the Hua-Paun, the north of Luang-Prabang, and Tran-Ninh. Melting silver of all descriptions and alloying it with copper is done in the Muong-Hou, in Vien-Poukha and in Xieng-Khong, where the inhabitants have frequent relations with the Shan and Youn regions. Our administration is making laudable efforts to prevent these practices by accepting in its treasuries only current coins which are whole and of the requisite degree of purity. But it must be admitted that the absence of a French system of coinage based on the "Salung" as the standard unit of weight is a serious obstacle to the complete disappearance of such practices.

It would indeed seem, at first glance, that the piaster of commerce which represents seven "salungs" in weight and in value is too large for a small coin, and too small for money of account if it be compared to the "Barre" or the Chinese "Tael." It does not lend itself readily to small operations, and its subdivisions into fifty, twenty and ten hundredths, that is to say in accordance with our decimal system, do not agree with the country's weights and measures. The piaster does indeed correspond in value and in weight to seven "salungs," but its decimal subdivisions do not in any way agree either with the multiples or the sub-multiples of the "salung." The result, in sum, is losses on the exchange and a very real inconvenience in many transactions.

149: Reinach--308 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
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COINS IN CURRENT USE

Metal	Denomination	Legal Weight in grams	Pure silver content	Value in francs at par	Value in francs at discount	Rate of exchange (francs)	Remarks
	1. French Coins						
Silver	Piaster of commerce	27	.9	5.40	5.35	2.50	Varies with the agio
Silver	50 cent piece	13.5	.9	2.70	2.68	1.25	Varies with the agio
Silver	20 " "	5.4	.9	1.08	1.072	0.50	Varies with the agio
Silver	10 " "	2.7	.9	0.54	0.535	0.25	Varies with the agio
Bronze	1 " "	10					
	2. Coins of British India						
Silver	Rupee	11.250	.91666	2.38	2.36	1.129	The rupee counts for .45 piaster or, exactly, for 0$.42855
Silver	1/2 rupee	5.6295	.91666	1.19	1.18	0.564	The rupee counts for .45 piaster or, exactly, for 0$.42855
Silver	1/4 rupee	2.8147	.91666	0.59	0.589	0.284	The rupee counts for .45 piaster or, exactly, for 0$.42855
Silver	1/8 rupee	1.407	.91666	0.30	0.29	0.142	The rupee counts for .45 piaster or, exactly, for 0$.42855

COINS IN CURRENT USE (continued)

Metal	Denomination	Legal Weight in grams	Pure silver content	Value in francs at par	Value in francs at discount	Rate of exchange (francs)	Remarks
3. Siamese Coins							
Silver	Tical	15.912	x	3.078	x	1.60	The Tical counts for .6 piaster or, exactly, for 60.57215
Silver	Salung	3.753	x	0.7695	x	0.375	
Silver	Fuang	1.8752	x	0.38475	x	0.1875	
Bronze	Fuang	45					
Bronze	Two att	11.25					
Bronze	One att	5.625					
Bronze	1/2 att	2.8125					
4. Chinese Coins							
Silver	Tael (Hong-Kong)	38.888			6.47 (1896)	4.02	Exchange varies
Silver	Tael (Shanghai)	37.53	x		7.18 (1896)	4.62	
Silver	Barre (10 Taels)	388.88			x		

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5. Laotian Coins

a) Copper coins

The "Lat" is worth from 1/200 to 1/400 piaster (1). This coin is shaped like a pirogue.

(1) The exchange varies as follows:
128 to the Tical at Bassac.
80 to the Tical at Kham-Thong-Niai.
24 to the Tical at Ban-Phone.
This "lat" was imported by Chinese from Oubone and Korat and is a base alloy of copper and zinc.

b) Iron coins

"The 'Duong,' a small bar of iron which is flattened down to a sharp edge at both ends, weighs about 120 grams and, depending on the supply, is worth from four to five hundredths of a piaster. This coin is in wide use among the Khas of the south, where it is much sought-after. It is manufactured in Cambodia, at Kompong-Soai, and it is also called 'Leklin.'"

c) Shell coins

"A string of 'Vene' of these shells, which are called 'Bias,' is worth two atts. Since there are a hundred shells in each string, each one is therefore worth 0$.0002. They are current only in Luang-Prabang" (2).

(2) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

d) Miscellaneous coins

The bar of pure silver weighing 482 grams is worth from 15 to 16 piasters, depending on the exchange.

The old bar, which was made of silver and had rounded ends, is rare and is used only in ceremonies, as a marriage coin.

There are no gold coins in Laos, nor, moreover, in the other countries of the Far East. Japan, however, has just adopted bimetallism by creating a gold standard for its coins, the "Gold Yen."

436 822 439 177

It will perhaps be of some interest to note here that the peoples of Laos have no respect for European gold coins, [420] because their gold is alloyed with copper! In this country, as in all of the Far East in general, it is thought that gold is the noble metal par excellance, that it is polluted and diminished by alloying it with copper, which is unworthy of it, and that it can endure being made into an alloy only with silver.

The only "gold" coins in use, and still not at all currently in northern Laos, are books of gold leaf the thickness of tinfoil. They come from China and bear the official stamps of the country's banks which put them into circulation as "merchandise" in the same way as bars of silver.

Weighing instruments

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The weighing instruments used in Laos include the "Ta-Dieng" or "Sing," a Chinese steelyard made of wood which has three rows of graduations. It may have a hook or a single platform, and is used for weights ranging from one "Sang" (1.23849 kilograms) up to several piculs.

For weights of less than a "Sang" the same kind of Chinese steelyard, with a hook or platform, is used, but it is smaller and made of ivory or bone.

A small pair of beam scales with platforms shaped like cupels, which is called "Sing-Dieng," is used mainly for weighing precious metals and gems.

There are several series of weights for balances. They are made of bronze, iron or copper and are most diverse in shape, representing elephants, imaginary birds, hexagons, pentagons, cones, pyramids, etc.

2. TRADE COMMODITIES AND PRODUCTS OF EXCHANGE

438 241

Since there is no industry to speak of in Laos, the local products which make up the basic commodities of interior trade and exports come mainly from agriculture, livestock raising, scavenging, fishing and hunting. Mention may be made, however, of certain products of local, not to say familial, industry which enter into interior commerce and to some extent into the trade which goes on with neighboring countries.

438 433

[421] These include cloth goods of pure silk, either plain or spangled with gold, goods of silk blended with cotton, and wholly cotton goods, then articles of jewelry and goldsmithing, and finally metals and ores from the still rudimentary mining industry and pottery goods, edge-tools, basketry, etc.